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PRM/ANE; NSC FOR KUMAR; JOINT STAFF FOR LTG SELVA; DEPT
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E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/22/2019
TAGS: [PTER](#) [EAID](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [GZ](#)
SUBJECT: HAMAS INTERFERENCE WITH USG ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS

Classified By: A/PO Greg Marchese for reasons 1.4 b and d.

Summary

11. (SBU) On December 21, Hamas confiscated two truckloads of USG-funded humanitarian shipments to Gaza, following a pattern of increased interference with USG assistance programs there. Over the last several weeks, Hamas has confiscated other shipments and otherwise harassed NGOs operating in Gaza. Some of the shipments, but not all, have been returned. In addition, Hamas now requires Palestinians to obtain "exit permits" before departing through Erez. End summary.

Confiscation of Supplies

12. (SBU) On December 21, representatives of the Hamas-controlled "Ministry of National Economy" (MoNE) in Gaza confiscated two truckloads of USAID supplies along with the two trucks carrying them. They subsequently released the trucks, but kept the supplies, following a pattern of Hamas interference with USAID's assistance programs in Gaza. One truckload included supplies for the American International School in Gaza (AISG), such as text books, water tanks, and science lab materials. The second truckload included relief supplies, principally household items, intended for Save the Children and CHF humanitarian assistance programs. The total value of the supplies amounted to USD 211,500.

13. (SBU) According to USAID's implementing partner, ARD, the MoNE justified its actions by stating that the shipment had not been properly coordinated. However, according to the Hamas-controlled "Ministry of Social Affairs" (MoSA) in Gaza -- as relayed to USAID through the UN Office of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) -- the responsible body for the coordination of humanitarian relief shipment into Gaza is MoSA, from which ARD received verbal clearance on December 21.

14. (SBU) On December 22, Hamas authorities released the items for AISG. However, MoNE continued to hold the CHF and Save the Children supplies (totaling 20 pallets). As a result of these confiscations, USAID has temporarily suspended new humanitarian shipments into Gaza under its ARD Civic Education Program.

15. (SBU) In previous weeks, MoNE confiscated two pallets in

a December 9 USAID-funded shipment by Save the Children. Despite the fact that Save the Children verified with MoSA its previous approval for the shipment, MoNE continues to hold the two pallets. On December 1, the MoNE confiscated two pallets destined for CHF and six pallets for Mercy Corps (out of a total of 68). CHF and Mercy Corps's pallets were released after the NGOs submitted documents, including a MoNE "no objection" letter and letters from two other Hamas agencies acknowledging the shipment of supplies.

Further Demands for Coordination

¶6. (C) Hamas's efforts to interfere with donor programs go beyond interfering with shipments. On December 8, the Hamas-controlled "Ministry of Local Government" (MoLG) in Gaza issued a letter to all Gazan municipalities stating that all NGOs must obtain written approval from the MoLG before implementing projects. The impact of this requirement on USG programming in the few remaining non-Hamas municipalities is not clear. Although the MoLG is not known to be a particularly powerful or well-resourced ministry, the letter was signed by Ziad al Zaza, who is the Hamas "Minister of Local Governance" as well as "Minister of National Economy" and "Deputy Prime Minister."

Exit Permit Policy

¶7. (SBU) Following the November 25 announcement of a new policy requiring exit permits for all Palestinians departing Gaza, the Hamas-controlled "Ministry of Interior" (MOI) in Gaza opened a permit office on December 7. Registration is

required for any Palestinian traveling through Erez (including medical referrals, local staff for international organizations, and businessmen). Only Palestinian staff of the UN who have UN identification cards are currently exempt. Travelers are required to fill out a form with personal and travel information, in addition to providing photos and copies of ID and passport. The traveler, however, does not need to submit the permit request in person. No fee is required.

Threats and Harassment

¶8. (C) In other acts of harassment, Mercy Corps's youth program in Gaza (which is not USG-funded) has been subject to increasing interference from Hamas authorities (or affiliates) over the last several months, with the apparent intention of segregating boys and girls in its youth program activities. In August, Mercy Corps reported that men without identification appeared at its offices asking questions about the program. These visits became routine at Mercy Corps's offices.

¶9. (C/NF) In the first week of December, men without identification appeared at the Mercy Corps offices again. The Mercy Corps deputy head of operations (a female U.S. citizen) refused to allow the men to enter. She said that only officials with proper identification would be allowed into Mercy Corps's offices. The unidentified men did not return but arrested two male youth participants in the program later in the week. According to Mercy Corps, the youths were asked to report to police headquarters in Gaza City. On December 10, one 20-year-old was detained for six hours and, according to Mercy Corps officials, pressed to collaborate with Hamas while being kicked and forced into humiliating positions.

¶10. (SBU) CHF reported that an Irish staff member had been held in detention for six hours by Hamas officials on December 16. CHF was told by Hamas security officials that the arrest was because the international staff member entered Gaza without Hamas-controlled MOI approval. NGO contacts believe the action was taken because the CHF Gaza Office Director had refused to meet with MOI officials when they

showed up unexpectedly at their office.

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